

a few individuals were recorded in short-grass meadows, which have recently been heavily grazed by ungulates. In such areas song was always given from a perch. Most were observed in mid-height grasses, c70–120 cm tall, occasionally on moist ground. The most widespread grass species were *Themeda triandra*, *Sporobolus fimbriatus* and *Chloris gayana*. North of the Mara River Black-backed Cisticola also uses 100–120 cm-high *Themeda* grassland with scattered *Acacia* (some up to 4 m tall). Small open-grassland patches within *Acacia* parkland were also utilised.

As several records of Black-backed Cisticola were made close to the Kenyan border the species may also be common in the southern Masai Mara, where habitats appear similar to those in Tanzania. It is surprising that so many records of the species were made in the wet season in Serengeti, given the relative lack of previous records from Tanzania or the Masai Mara. The records may result from a genuine expansion of the species' range or may be indicative of the relative lack of attention most observers pay cisticolas. Few ornithologists have visited the northern Serengeti as the roads are sometimes very bad, especially during the wet season, and because of problems with poachers.

Compared to the breeding males illustrated by Urban *et al*² and Zimmermann *et al*³ those seen in Serengeti National Park had noticeably longer tails. Though the Serengeti birds were in breeding plum-

age their tail lengths matched illustrations of non-breeding individuals in Urban *et al*² and Zimmermann *et al*³.

Additional research is required to determine if the small population of Black-backed Cisticola in north Tanzania will persist, given that the principal threat to the species' habitat is man-made fire.

Acknowledgements

I thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for funding the field work and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA) and Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) for permission to work in Serengeti National Park. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of F M Chalamila in the field and specially thank Barbara Hartmann for translating the French summary.

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The status of Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* in Morocco

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Cette note rapporte l'observation de neuf Traquets isabelles *Oenanthe isabellina* au Maroc, entre les 13 et 17 mars 2001. Ces données confirment la régularité, déjà soupçonnée, de l'espèce dans le pays. Ce traquet est vraisemblablement régulier en petit nombre dans le sud-est du Maroc, en février-mars, période pendant laquelle un passage prénuptial important est constaté en Algérie.

Between 13 and 17 March 2001, we birded arid areas of south-east Morocco, noting migrant passerines such as Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. For most species, it appears that individuals we saw were among the first to cross the Sahara that spring. The surprise was Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*, which we recorded on several occasions with a total of nine individuals (see Appendix). We managed to take some photographs (see Fig 3) and all records have been submitted to the Moroccan Rare Birds Committee.

Isabelline Wheatear is considered an accidental visitor to Morocco¹: the 19 previous records concern individuals between 25 January and 26 April, principally in February (six) and March (seven). All but five records are from the south-east of the country, with the others from West Saharan Morocco (P Bergier pers comm). Dufourny², who described two Isabelline Wheatears seen near Touroug (west of Erfoud), on 16 February 1993, considered the species as possibly regular as a spring migrant throughout south-east Morocco. Indeed, more regular occurrence of Isabelline Wheatear in Morocco during early spring



Figure 1. Black-backed Cisticola *Cisticola eximius*, northern part of Serengeti National Park, 15 April 2000 (Thomas Gottschalk)



Figure 2. Habitat of Black-backed Cisticola *Cisticola eximius*; mid-height grassland with *Themeda triandra* and *Sporobolus fimbriatus*, northern part of Serengeti National Park, 5 June 2000 (Thomas Gottschalk)



Figure 3. Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*, Barrage Hassan Ad-Dakhlil, 17 March 2001 (Gilles Willem)

can be expected, as it appears to be a regular migrant in February–March in Algeria^{3,4}, and it winters west to Senegal and Mauritania. Our records confirm this expectation. The relatively low numbers previously recorded can be explained by the lack of ornithological activity in February–March. Indeed, most birders visit (or formerly did so) in December–January, notably in search of Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, and others come later in spring, to find summer migrants such as Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*. It is also possible that Isabelline Wheatear crosses Morocco in a few days, and some are overlooked among high numbers of other comparatively similar species, such Northern and Desert Wheatears *Oenanthe deserti*.

With another record in 2000 (currently under consideration by the Moroccan Rare Birds Committee), there are now 26 records (involving 32

individuals) of Isabelline Wheatear in Morocco. The species can no longer be considered as an accidental visitor, but should be regarded as a regular, if scarce, spring migrant through the country.

Acknowledgements

We thank Guy Kirwan who encouraged us to write this note and suggested improvements to its draft, and Patrick Bergier who provided data on previous records in Morocco.

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Appendix: Isabelline Wheatears *Oenanthe isabellina* recorded in south-east Morocco, in March 2001 by the authors. Numbers in brackets indicate the number of individuals.

Ouarzazate, 13 March (one)

Alnif (between Tazzarine and Erfoud), 15 March (three)

Erfoud, 16 March (one)

Merzouga, 16 March (one)

Barrage Hassan Ad-Dakhlil (Errachidia), 17 March (one)

Rich (Between Errachidia and Midelt), 17 March (two)
